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RURAL SCHOOLS FOR  
LESS MONEY



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A Study  
of the Rural Schools of  
Boone County  
Illinois



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By  
H. S. HICKS  
February, 1925

## FOREWORD



ABOUT one-half of all the elementary school children in Illinois, outside of Cook County, are enrolled in the One-Room School Districts of the State. Their educational welfare is a matter of state-wide interest. It presents the most important legislative problem in Illinois today, both from the standpoint of the child and the heavily burdened rural tax payer.

The child who is fortunate enough to reside in the rural districts of Illinois in the vicinity of a good rural school is indeed fortunate. No better environment can be found for educational development. Removed from the distractions of moving pictures, theatres, baseball games, and pool halls, and in close contact with green fields and running brooks the country boy and girl, surrounded by few distractions, have an unequaled opportunity for acquiring a good common-school education. Two things only are necessary, a competent teacher and enough pupils enrolled in the school to make a healthy competition in class room work.

This study has been made by one who in his boyhood days enjoyed these advantages and is still firm in the conviction that the one-room rural school has not outlived its usefulness as a part of our Educational System.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Mr. Homer Hall, County Superintendent of Schools of Boone County; Mr. William Bowley, County Clerk of Boone County; and to Miss Elizabeth Harvey, Superintendent of Schools in Belvidere, for their generous assistance in collecting the data upon which this study is based.

H. S. HICKS.

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*Ill. Historical Survey*

## The Rural Schools of Boone County, Illinois

From a bulletin recently issued by the Bureau of Education at Washington, the following paragraph is quoted:

### The One-Teacher School the Cinderella of Our Educational System

"The one-teacher school in the United States appears in comparison with the best graded schools like Cinderella sitting among the ashes. The building in which it is housed is usually the meanest type of school building; the supplies furnished rural children are the scantiest; the school term the shortest; the rural teachers represent the most inexperienced, the least adequately trained and the least skilled group of teachers; community support of the school is usually less enthusiastic than the support accorded any other type of school in the State. The one-teacher school, like Cinderella, has inherent possibilities of development, but the State must play the fairy Godmother and wave fairy wands in the shape of wise legislation before it realizes its educational possibilities, before rural children are given educational advantages equal to those of urban children."

For the purpose of disclosing such facts as will show whether the above indictment is true or false this study of the one-room schools of Boone County has been made. Several reasons appeal to the writer as making Boone County a desirable County to study. It is one of the smallest counties in Illinois in point of population and area, being approximately twelve miles wide and twenty-four miles long and containing 288 square miles. It has a population of 15,322 and like most of the other agricultural counties of the State had less people in 1920 than it had in 1910. Its population is very evenly divided between city and country. The 1920 census shows that there were 7,518 rural inhabitants and 7,804 urban. Boone County contains 1,325 farms; the land is fertile and productive and like most of the other agricultural counties of Illinois, about one-half of the rural population are tenant farmers. The census of 1920 shows that there were 697

farms operated by owners and 615 farms operated by tenant and the balance operated by farm managers.

In every way Boone County is fairly typical of the average agricultural County in central and northern Illinois, and the rural school conditions are no doubt about the same in this County as they are throughout northern and central Illinois. Its elementary schools, like all other counties of Illinois, can be divided into two classes:

- (1) The one-room district school with one teacher and all pupils under that teacher's supervision.
- (2) The grade school containing two or more teachers where the pupils are divided according to age and educational advancement.

Boone County has five grade school districts with a total enrollment of 1251 as follows:

Belvidere .....	941	Poplar Grove .....	87
Capron .....	100	Garden Prairie .....	62
Caledonia .....	61		

Forty-two teachers are employed in the grade schools of the County. There are sixty-one one-room districts having an enrollment varying from 33 in the largest school to 3 in the smallest.

The total enrollment in the 61 rural districts is 1082.

The average number of pupils per teacher in the grade schools of the County is 30 and in the rural schools, 17.

## The Elementary Teachers of Boone County

For the purpose of showing the relative ages, salaries, teaching experience and teachers' training of the two groups of teachers parallel tables are shown.

All of the teachers in both grade and rural schools hold certificates for teaching. These certificates are of two kinds, known as first grade and second grade. Of 61 rural teachers, 2 hold first grade certificates, and of the 42 grade teachers 29 hold first grade certificates; 59 of the rural teachers have second grade certificates, and 13 of the grade teachers have second grade certificates.



## Age of Teachers

Grade Schools	Rural Schools
20 years..... 3	18 years.... 9
21 years..... 1	19 years.... 10
22 years..... 3	20 years.... 16
23 years..... 3	21 years.... 4
24 years..... 4	22 years.... 6
25 years..... 1	23 years.... 3
27 years..... 1	24 years.... 3
29 years..... 1	25 years.... 2
31 years..... 2	29 years.... 1
33 years..... 1	30 years.... 1
34 years..... 2	31 years.... 1
35 years..... 2	33 years.... 1
36 years..... 1	35 years.... 1
37 years..... 2	36 years.... 1
38 years..... 2	48 years.... 1
43 years..... 1	
44 years..... 1	
45 years..... 2	
47 years..... 1	
48 years..... 2	
49 years..... 1	
50 years..... 1	Average Age
57 years..... 1	21 years
59 years..... 1	
65 years..... 1	
Average Age	
34 years	

## Salary of Teachers

Grade Schools	Rural Schools
\$ 855.00.... 2	\$ 600.00... 2
900.00.... 4	637.50... 2
1000.00.... 5	640.00... 1
1025.00.... 2	675.00... 1
1035.00.... 1	680.00... 2
1050.00.... 5	720.00... 11
1075.00.... 1	765.00... 1
1100.00.... 4	807.50... 1
1125.00.... 5	810.00... 7
1150.00.... 4	855.00... 5
1200.00.... 2	900.00... 15
1215.00.... 1	945.00... 3
1225.00.... 2	952.00... 1
1250.00.... 1	990.00... 4
1300.00.... 1	999.00... 1
1425.00.... 2	1035.00... 1
	1080.00... 1
	1125.00... 1
	1170.00... 1
Average Salary	Average Salary
\$1090.00	\$840.00

## Teaching Experience

Grade Schools	Rural Schools
None..... 5	None..... 13
1 year.... 2	1 year.... 11
1½ years... 1	2 years.... 15
2 years.... 3	3 years.... 8
3 years.... 1	4 years.... 4
3½ years... 2	5 years.... 3
4 years.... 1	6 years.... 1
5 years.... 2	7 years.... 1
6 years.... 2	10 years.... 2
7 years.... 1	12 years.... 1
8 years.... 1	13 years.... 1
10 years... 1	16 years.... 1
10½ years... 1	
12 years.... 2	
13 years.... 3	
14 years.... 1	
15 years.... 1	
16 years.... 2	
17 years.... 4	
19 years.... 1	
24 years.... 1	
25 years.... 1	Average
38 years.... 1	2.8 years
40 years.... 1	
47 years.... 1	
Average	
11.3 years	

## Teachers' Training

Grade Schools
3 years Normal..... 1
2 years Normal..... 15
1 year Normal..... 5
33 weeks Normal..... 1
25 weeks Normal..... 1
24 weeks Normal..... 1
15 weeks Normal..... 1
6 weeks Normal..... 2
Total number of teachers who have attended Normal Schools.. 27
Rural Schools
1 year Normal..... 2
20 weeks Normal..... 2
12 weeks Normal..... 2
8 weeks Normal..... 2
6 weeks Normal..... 5
Total number of teachers who have attended Normal Schools.. 12
Average Normal Training
Grade School teachers..... 1 year
Rural School teachers..... 3 weeks

These figures show two things conclusively:

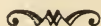
(First) That the rural teachers receive less pay than the grade school teachers. (Second) That they are younger and more inexperienced.

In making this comparison no reflection is intended on any rural teacher in Boone County. No doubt, among the group of 61 teachers, there are many who have marked teaching ability and are doing good work, but as a group they do not seem to average up to the standards of the city school teachers.

The essential thing in making any school a good school is a skilled teacher and the things that make a skilled teacher are: (1) Native teaching ability; (2) Professional training; (3) Experience under intelligent supervision.

In Boone County the rural teachers, as compared with the grade teachers, are lacking in all of these factors. The result which must flow from this situation is that the rural children of Boone County have poorer elementary schooling than the town and city children of the County.

In other words, there is no equality of educational opportunity existing between the rural children and the urban children of Boone County.



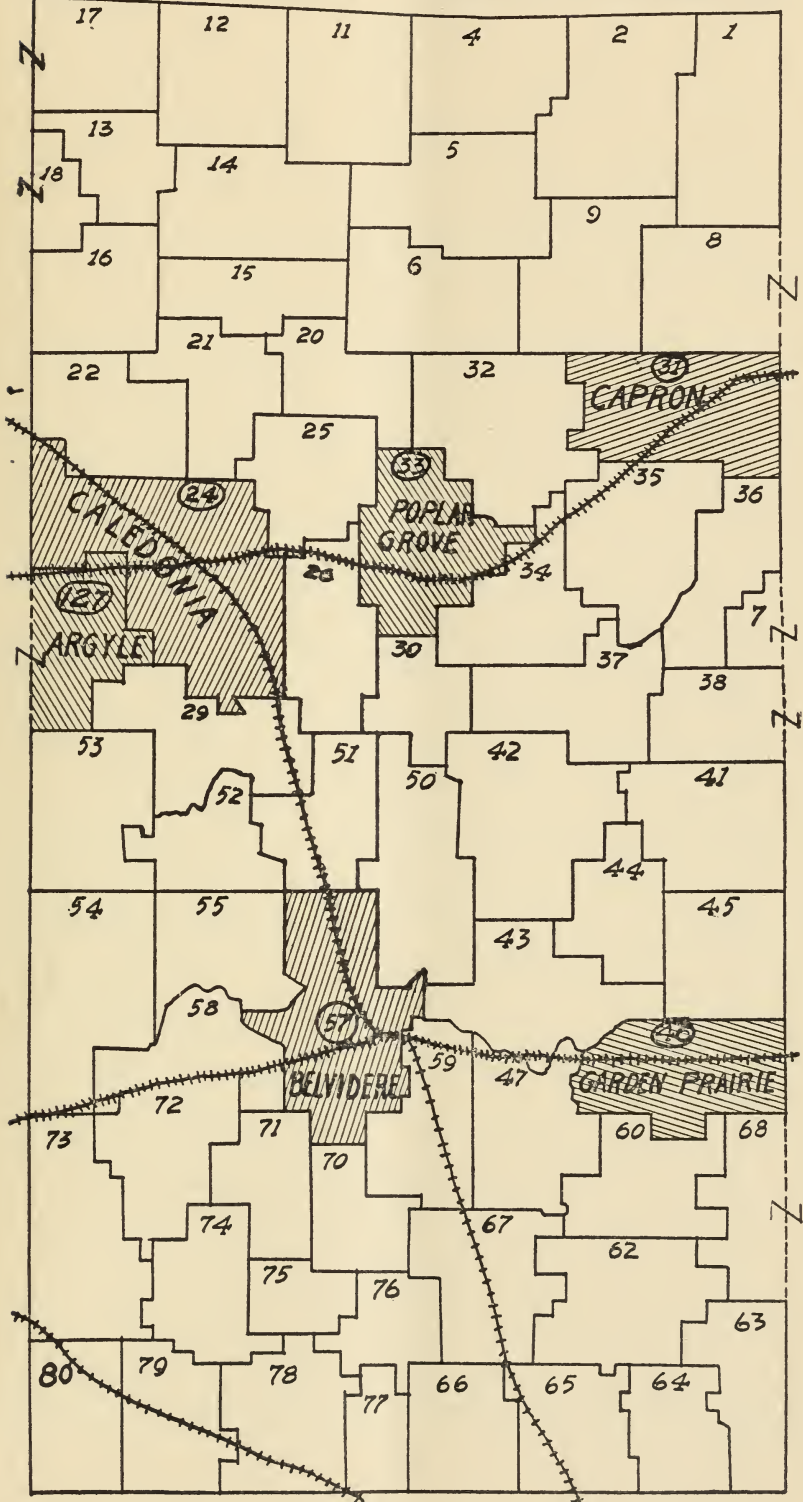
## The Financial Organization of the Rural Schools

When one first sees a map of an Illinois County divided into rural school districts his curiosity is usually aroused as to how the districts became organized, into such irregular, misshapen, geographical monstrosities. Occasionally one will discover districts containing less than three sections of land while often in the same County other one-room districts may be found containing ten or twelve sections. Assessed valuation and tax rates vary as greatly as do the area of the districts. In Boone County, District 13 has an assessed valuation of \$41,832 and a school tax rate of \$1.96, while District 58 has an assessed valuation of \$195,388 and a school tax rate of 32 cents. Where assessed valuations are low, tax rates are usually high, and where valuations are high, tax rates are correspondingly low.

The following is a list of the sixty-one school districts of Boone County showing assessed valuation and enrollment and illustrates the wide variation in financial ability of the various districts to maintain a school:



# BOONE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS.



Dist. No.	Ass'd Val.	Enrollment
*18	\$ 33,095.00	15
13	41,832.00	13
75	47,813.00	11
30	52,321.00	15
76	57,884.00	12
64	59,908.00	13
70	63,388.00	10
20	64,822.00	11
52	67,106.00	12
77	69,508.00	14
36	72,015.00	6
*68	72,015.00	21
15	72,223.00	11
16	72,713.00	8
*38	75,187.00	20
44	76,943.00	20
74	80,123.00	29
60	81,739.00	12
11	81,939.00	18
21	83,730.00	17
66	85,773.00	14
12	87,891.00	28
63	89,134.00	10
*17	90,468.00	27
71	90,720.00	29
4	90,887.00	21
6	93,871.00	14
45	95,222.00	21
55	96,306.00	8
53	99,702.00	23
*8	100,244.00	22
41	100,314.00	13
37	103,504.00	16
25	104,999.00	10
9	109,375.00	17
78	109,900.00	17
34	110,241.00	18
5	112,110.00	25
62	114,346.00	17
14	116,781.00	22
80	120,391.00	11
26	121,686.00	22
51	123,367.00	22
2	125,698.00	21
50	128,273.00	23
72	132,847.00	16
47	133,902.00	33
32	137,531.00	29
61	142,745.00	10
43	143,910.00	24
29	144,882.00	19
35	146,768.00	17
22	146,864.00	3
54	150,506.00	17
65	152,193.00	30
73	154,042.00	22
1	155,031.00	22
59	161,722.00	22
42	162,945.00	21
79	166,152.00	19
58	195,388.00	21

\*These districts are partially in Boone County and partially in adjoining county. In each case the assessed valuation in Boone County is given. In District No. 7 the school house is in McHenry County but the district has an assessed value of \$21,114.00 in Boone County.

The total assessed value of the 61 one-room districts and parts of districts in Boone County is \$6,395,949.

Each of these districts has a board of three directors, making a total of 183 school officials for the 61 districts.

Fifteen of the districts have an attendance of 12 or less pupils, and the average enrollment for the sixty-one districts is 17 pupils per school.

It is a noteworthy fact that any rural community composed of one-half tenant farmers has a shifting population. This frequent changing of location by tenant farmers has a pronounced effect on the district school enrollment. The first of March of each year always produces gains in enrollment in some districts and corresponding losses in others, but usually it makes but little difference to the taxpayer who produces the money necessary to maintain the school. A school which drops to an enrollment of only two or three pupils costs as much to maintain as a school which has an enrollment of 25 or 30. Because of these facts it necessarily follows that in a system of rural education organized on the Illinois plan, a great economic waste is constantly going on which would not occur under a different scheme of organization.

To maintain a one-room school with only two or three pupils is not only unfair to the children but to the taxpayer as well.

The tax rate last year in the 61 rural districts varied from 32 cents on the One Hundred Dollars assessed valuation in District 58 to \$2.00 on the One Hundred Dollars assessed valuation in District No. 20.

The average tax rate for the 61 districts was \$1.13.

## Summary

The Rural School situation of Boone County can therefore be summarized as follows:

Total Number of Schools.....	61
Total Assessed Valuation of all One-Room Districts.....	\$6,395,949
Average Tax Rate.....	\$ 1.13
Total Enrollment.....	1082
Average Enrollment.....	17
Average Teacher Salary.....	\$ 840.00
Average Age of Teachers.....	21 years
Average Teaching Experience.....	2.8 years
Average Normal School Training.....	3 weeks
Number of Schools having 12 or less Pupils.....	15
Number of Schools having more than 12 Pupils.....	46

## A Plan of Reorganization

There is now pending in the Illinois Legislature a bill known as Senate Bill No. 50, which provides a plan of reorganization of the one-room district schools of the State. The essential provisions of the bill are:

(1) That for purposes of administration and taxation all one-room school districts of each county shall be combined into one school district.

(3) The County Superintendent of schools is made **Ex-Officio** Secretary of the County Board of Education.

(4) A uniform tax rate is levied throughout the district.

(5) Supervision of rural teachers is provided for.

(6) No school of less than 12 pupils can be maintained unless with the consent of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

(7) The County Board of Education may provided transportation for pupils in cases where in their judgment it is necessary.

The application of this plan to the rural schools of Boone County will now be made.

If all one-room districts of Boone County should be united into a single district for purposes of administration and taxation the County District would have an assessed valuation of \$6,395,949.

## Application of Senate Bill 50 to Boone County

If all schools now being conducted with twelve or less pupils were closed and the pupils distributed in the remaining schools it would give the 46 schools which would be conducted an average enrollment of 24 pupils each.

The average salary now being paid in Boone County for rural teachers is \$840 and the average school year is less than 9 months. By increasing the salary of teachers to an average of \$900 per year and the school year to 9 months it would require the sum of \$900 per school for salary of teacher and to this should be added the sum of \$150 per school for fuel and supplies, making a cost of \$1050 per school or the total sum of \$48,300 for the year for the 46 schools.

All school districts in the State of Illinois receive financial aid from the State from what is known as the State School Fund. Under the present law Boone County rural schools will receive about \$6,500 from the State per year. Deducting the \$6,500 which would be paid by the State from the \$48,300 required to run the schools would leave a balance of \$41,800 to be raised by local taxation. A tax rate of 66 cents on the \$100 assessed valuation would yield over \$42,000 or more than enough money when combined with the amount received from the State to finance the 46 schools for one year.

The tax rates last year in the 61 rural districts varied from 32 cents on the one hundred dollars assessed valuation in District 58 to \$2.00 on the one hundred dollars assessed valuation in District 20. The average tax rate for the 61 districts was \$1.13.

There are 54 districts in the County which had a tax rate last year of over 66 cents, and seven districts where the tax rates were lower than 66 cents.

The following table shows the increase and decrease in tax rates in all districts if the county should be reorganized along the lines indicated:



## Districts Having a Tax Rate of Less Than 66 Cents

Dist. No.	Tax Rate	Increase
58 .....	\$ .32 .....	\$ .34
29 .....	.43 .....	.23
35 .....	.56 .....	.10
26 .....	.59 .....	.07
1 .....	.60 .....	.06
72 .....	.62 .....	.04
22 .....	.63 .....	.03

## Districts Having a Tax Rate of Over 66 Cents

Dist. No.	Tax Rate	Decrease	Dist. No.	Tax Rate	Decrease
54 .....	\$ .68 .....	\$ .02	51 .....	\$1.16 .....	\$ .50
59 .....	.70 .....	.04	45 .....	1.18 .....	.52
79 .....	.74 .....	.08	8 .....	1.18 .....	.52
50 .....	.80 .....	.14	37 .....	1.19 .....	.53
61 .....	.80 .....	.14	71 .....	1.24 .....	.58
62 .....	.81 .....	.15	4 .....	1.24 .....	.58
47 .....	.84 .....	.18	11 .....	1.25 .....	.59
80 .....	.85 .....	.19	36 .....	1.29 .....	.62
43 .....	.86 .....	.20	21 .....	1.29 .....	.63
6 .....	.88 .....	.22	17 .....	1.30 .....	.64
55 .....	.91 .....	.25	53 .....	1.34 .....	.68
63 .....	.92 .....	.26	15 .....	1.42 .....	.67
34 .....	.93 .....	.27	16 .....	1.43 .....	.77
78 .....	.93 .....	.27	12 .....	1.46 .....	.80
9 .....	.94 .....	.28	64 .....	1.46 .....	.80
65 .....	.95 .....	.29	38 .....	1.47 .....	.81
42 .....	.95 .....	.29	44 .....	1.47 .....	.81
25 .....	.98 .....	.32	16 .....	1.48 .....	.82
73 .....	1.00 .....	.34	60 .....	1.50 .....	.84
14 .....	1.01 .....	.35	68 .....	1.65 .....	.99
74 .....	1.02 .....	.36	18 .....	1.66 .....	1.00
41 .....	1.02 .....	.36	77 .....	1.77 .....	1.11
2 .....	1.06 .....	.40	75 .....	1.93 .....	1.27
66 .....	1.07 .....	.41	30 .....	1.96 .....	1.30
32 .....	1.12 .....	.46	13 .....	1.96 .....	1.30
70 .....	1.13 .....	.47	52 .....	1.98 .....	1.32
5 .....	1.14 .....	.48	20 .....	2.00 .....	1.44

## Supervision and Transportation

There is probably no single thing that can happen to the one-room schools of Illinois which would do as much to raise their efficiency as the introduction of supervision for rural teachers. Most of the teachers in the rural schools of Illinois are young boys and girls only recently out of school. Often they are struggling with conditions which would discourage experienced and trained teachers. Of all the teachers in Illinois the rural teachers most needs the sympathetic aid of an experienced supervising teacher.

Recognizing this fact the pending bill provides for the employment of one supervising teacher for every 25 teachers employed in the district. This would, of course, entail additional expense. In Boone County two supervising teachers would be required and their salary and traveling expenses would probably amount to about \$3,000 per year.



To raise this amount an additional 5 cents would have to be added to the proposed tax rate.

The only other item of expense which might be found necessary is the transportation of pupils. The plan would require the closing of 15 schools in the county. These 15 schools have an enrollment of 145 pupils. Sending these pupils to the schools of adjoining districts might in some cases make it necessary to provide transportation.

Assuming that this cost would not exceed an average of \$20.00 per pupil per year the total expenditure for transportation would be less than \$3,000 which would require possibly the addition of another 5 cents to the tax rate.

If then, both supervision and transportation should be provided the rate would probably be 76 cents instead of 66 cents. This addition, however, would make only a slight difference in the foregoing computations on gain and loss. With this addition to the tax rate ten districts instead of seven, would find the tax rate increased over what they are now paying and 51 districts would have tax reductions and all would have better and more efficient schools.

Rural children are entitled to something better than they are now getting in the way of instruction in the fundamentals of English learning. The interests of the State demand that there be better equalization of educational advantages between the rural boy and girl on the one hand and the city boy and girl on the other. Common fairness demands that an equalization of the tax burden for school maintenance among rural tax payers be established by law. These changes can and doubtless will be brought about but in doing so there should first be created in the minds of the rural citizen the belief that a system which is hallowed by age and endeared by sentiment can be improved by change and that such modification will be to the advantage of both parent and child.



